



Front Line Food Safety

Food safety resources
for food managers and supervisors
to train food service workers

October 2026

Rodent Control in Food Establishments

With the arrival of Fall and lower outdoor temperatures, rats and mice seek shelter indoors where it is warm and there is a reliable source of food and water. In addition to carrying diseases such as Hantavirus and salmonella, rodents destroy food products and contaminate food contact surfaces with urine and feces.

To effectively control rodents in and around your food establishment, you should employ an Integrated Pest Management (IPM) approach including the following steps:

Pest Proof Your Building

Carefully seal any openings to the outside of the building. Mice can squeeze through openings as small as a dime. Rats can get through openings as small as a quarter. Particularly focus on areas such as:

- ◆ The gap under exterior doors
- ◆ Where pipes enter or leave the building
- ◆ Where wiring enters the building
- ◆ Any holes or gaps in the building siding, roof, or foundation

Rodents can gnaw through wood, foam insulation, rubber, and many other materials. It is best to fill openings with steel wool and then apply an expanding foam or caulk sealant. Metal flashing can be used to cover larger holes. Be sure door sweeps fit snugly.



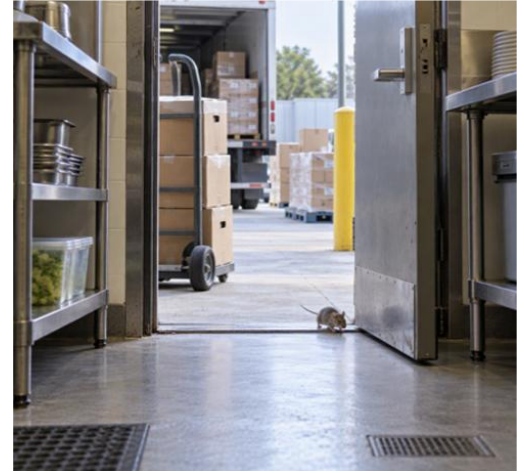
One mouse in your dining room can light up social media in your community for a week, ruin your reputation, and cost you thousands of dollars of business.

Keep Your Doors Closed

Open doors are an open invitation for rodents. Propping doors open during deliveries or when taking out the trash puts out the welcome mat for rats and mice.

Inspect Deliveries

Carefully inspect deliveries. There may be uninvited guests hitching a ride into your kitchen. Look inside boxes and crates. Break down cardboard boxes as soon as they are unpacked and put them in your recycling bin or dumpster.



Use Proper Food Storage Practices

Check storage areas frequently. Store food up off the floor in rodent-proof containers. Keep food covered to keep pests out. Rotate your stock. **Remember: First In, First Out (FIFO).** Be alert for signs of rodent activity such as:

- ◆ Rodent droppings
- ◆ Gnaw marks on food or food packaging
- ◆ Nesting materials such as shredded paper or insulation
- ◆ Greasy rub marks where rats frequently travel along baseboards or walls

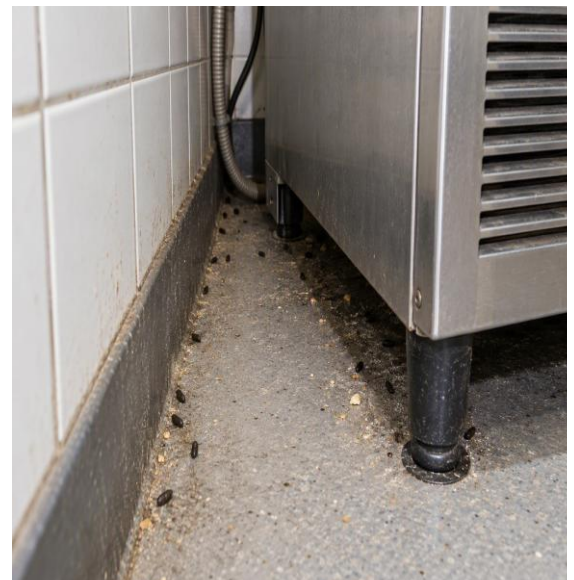
Use a blacklight to spot urine trails left by rodents.

Clean Regularly & Thoroughly

Don't give rodents a free meal. Clean as you go during the day. Clean up spills immediately. Don't leave food setting out on counters or prep tables. Keep all trash cans covered and empty them regularly.

Give the entire kitchen and dining room a good cleaning when closing for the night. Rodents are nocturnal and will be most active after you leave.

Establish a regular cleaning schedule for areas under and behind equipment and in storage areas. Inspect weekly for signs of rodent activity. Mouse droppings are the size of grains of rice and are black or dark brown. Rat droppings are a bit larger.



Inspect Outside Areas

Don't forget the areas outside your food establishment. Keep your dumpster closed and the area around it clean. Be sure grease barrels and recycling bins are covered.

Make sure that weeds or shrubbery around your building aren't providing rodent harborage. Look for rodent burrows around the building foundation.

Seal any openings around where pipes or wiring penetrate the building envelope.



Act Promptly When You Spot Rodent Activity

As soon as you see any signs of rodent activity, set out snap traps or glue boards in those areas. DO NOT use poison baits inside the building.

Check your traps frequently and promptly dispose of any rodents you catch, then set the traps again. You may have more than just one rat or mouse.



Call a Pest Control Professional

If you are experiencing persistent problems with rodents or have a major problem, call a licensed pest control professional. They can advise you on the best integrated pest management strategies.

A licensed pest control operator can also provide you with tamper-resistant bait stations to place around the outside of your building. These should be placed in secure locations that are not accessible to children or pets.



For more information, contact your local health department at: